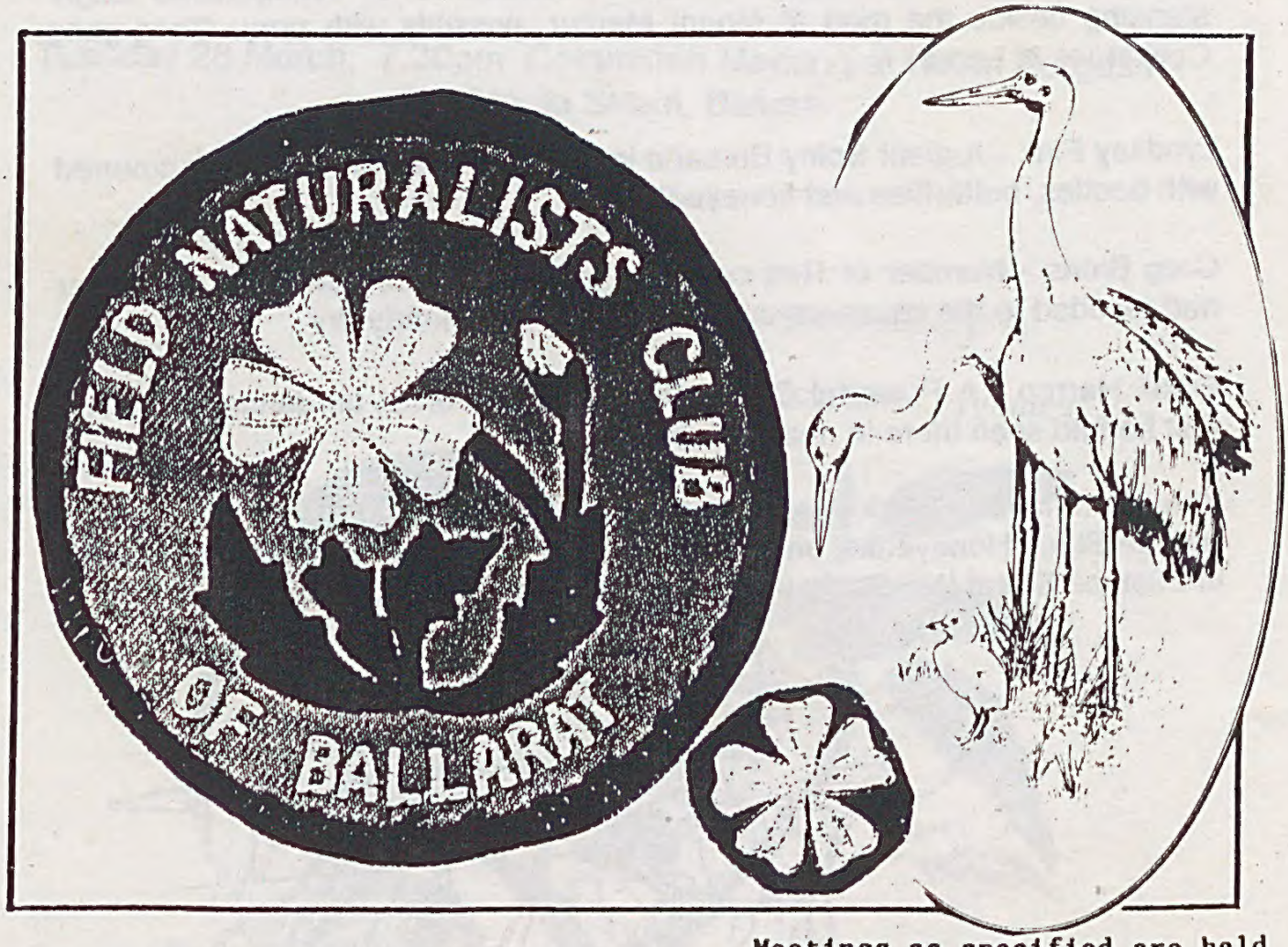
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated

MARCH 1995

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting	Mar 3	Annual General Meeting and Members Night
Meeting	Apr 7	Dr J McLaughlin: Barn Owls
Excursion	Mar 5	Brolga Excursion to Willaura: G Binns, M Rotheram, G Cerini
Excursion	Apr 9	Williamsons Creek: Lyndsay Fink



President: Mr J Gregurke
Secretary: Mrs M Rotheram
Treasurer: Mr G Binns
Editor: Mr A Dyson

PO Box 328W

Meetings as specified are held at the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street Sth, Art Building, commencing at 7.30 p.m. EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM BOOK CITY, cnr STURT AND ARMSTRONG STS, BALLARAT at 9.30 a.m. for FULL DAY OUTING

Field Reports (February 3, 1995)

John Gregurke - Visited a big eucalypt tree at Moggs Creek in the Angahook-Lorne Forest Park. A group of 10 - 15 New Holland Honeyeaters were feeding on sap through holes in the bark. The Ranger said that the holes were made by Yellow-bellied Gliders. The Gregurkes returned at dusk to watch for the Yellow-bellied Gliders. They did not appear but about a dozen Sugar Gliders came down to feed. Some glided 30 - 40 metres. The president of "Angair" was there with a spotlight and said she had seen the Yellow-bellied Gliders about 30 times this summer, including one pair with a young one.

Alan Morrison - Four Blue-billed Ducks on Lake Wendouree near the kiosk and a snipe at the Convent corner.

Ken McDonnell - A possible phenomenon due to the drought ... Ringtail Possums had built nests in shrubbery at St George's Lake, up to 3 in a bush. Huge numbers of birds on Tullaroop Reservoir - thousands of Shelduck, hundreds of Black Cormorants and Swans. The water was black with birds in places.

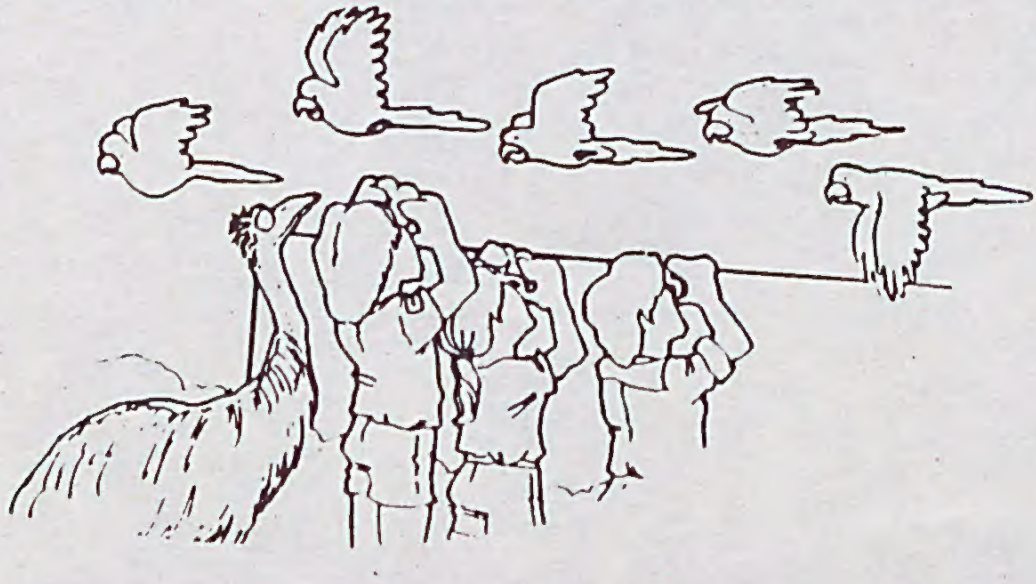
Carol Hall - Blue-billed Duck at Lake Wendouree. A Wedgetailed Eagle standing beside the road at Mount Mercer, possibly with prey. Gang-gang Cockatoos at Lorne.

Lyndsay Fink - A giant Spiny Bursaria in his garden at Meredith was covered with beetles, butterflies and honeyeaters.

Greg Binns - Number of Red-capped Plover at Winter Swamp. The water had receded to the causeway and the swamp was nearly dry.

Frank Harrap - A Powerful Owl in the Wombat Forest on January 11. The first he had seen there in nearly nine years.

Ken Hammond - Black Honeyeaters were still in Wendouree. He saw a female Black Honeyeater on the nature strip plantation in front of his house in Eustace Street the previous day. Also three Eastern Rosellas.



Helen Burgess - Reported that Florence Chuk had seen stands of Potato Orchids at Mt Buninyong Lookout.

Claire Dalman - A dead wallaby in 'Fairyland' at Lake Wendouree.

Alan Morrison - Saved a Swamphen from a dog attack on February 2 and found a dead Swan nearby.

These reports prompted some lively discussion with members agreeing that unrestrained dogs were still a problem at the lake. The council by-law that dogs should be on leads was not being enforced.
Maureen Christie commented that in Germany she had seen a "hundergarten" (as opposed to a "kindergarten") - a special place for dogs with trees and "sniffing posts".

DIARY DATES

Tuesday 28 March: 7.30pm Committee Meeting at Helen Burgess' -

FEATHERTAIL GLIDER

Acrobates pygmaeus



Grasslands of the Western Plains and *Mooramong*

Neville Scarlett from the Botany Department of LaTrobe University spoke at our February meeting. Neville has a special interest in the natural history of the Western Plains.

The plains, made up of Palaeozoic bedrock and Tertiary sediment, existed before volcanic activity commenced around 4 million years ago. Liquid lava from volcanic eruptions covered large areas of the plains.

The Western Plains area has a range of soil types relating to the age and degree of weathering of lava flows. Soils range from the almost stony and skeletal in the east to the black and deep grey lime-rich clays in the west. Because of the varying features of the plains, (lava volcanoes, scoria cones, tuff rings, lakes and ridges of lava), and the varying rainfalls and soil types there is a great range of vegetation. Neville emphasised "basalt vegetation" is not only grassland. It is unlikely that the plains were ever completely treeless - many of the trees lining watercourses (mainly River Red Gum), remain.

We were shown slides of typical plains vegetation including:

River Red Gums near Skipton.

Blackwood, Swamp Gum and Manna Gum in the Brisbane Ranges near Durdidwarrah.

Healthy Kangaroo Grass (Themeda triandra) near Streatham. Neville spoke of the 'ideal' circumstances here - a rainfall of 600 ml., no superphosphate and only light grazing. This tussocky perennial grass was once the dominant species over much of the Western Plains.

'Typical" plains grassland featuring Blue Devil (Eryngium ovinum). Everlastings (Helichrysums) and Lemon Beauty-heads (Calocephalus citreus).

Swampy areas featuring the white Swamp Daisy (Brachyscome cardiocarpa). Grazing has affected this daisy in some areas but with its natural habitat in seasonal swamps and on lake margins it does have some protection from heavy grazing.

At Rokewood - areas of Kangaroo Grass, Common Everlasting (Helichrysum apiculatum) and Button Wrinklewort (Rutidosis leptorrhynchoides). The Button Wrinklewort was once widespread but is now endangered (and consequently listed on the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988). It survives on a few scattered sites on the basalt plains.

Many mosses and liverworts. "Crusts" of these plants also serve as important regeneration beds for other flora.

A railway line at Inverleigh. Grassland remnants are often confined to the sides of roads and railway lines.

Another endangered species - the Small Psoralea (Psoralea parva). It belongs to the Pea (Fabaceae) family, has long trailing stems and small mauve flowers in summer. It usually occurs on wet or flooded sites and often near streams. It has recently been found near Warrambeen.

Yam-daisy (Microseris lanceolata) with its' bright yellow flowers. The Yam-daisy was once very common on the grassland plains but it is now rare and restricted to small protected areas. The fleshy root tubers were a staple food of the aboriginal people.

Large-fruit Groundsel (Senecio macrocarpus) - a low bushy herb with narrow wooly grey leaves and large yellow flowers. This plant was once widespread over western Victoria but is now confined to 15 small sites - including 2 near Bannockburn and 1 at Deep Lead.

Conservation and Management

In the past 150 years well over 90% of Victorian lowland grasslands have been destroyed or greatly modified and this decline continues. Although many remnants persist along roads and railways, and in some old cemeteries they cover little of their former area. Farming practices have destroyed much of the lowland grasses. Many linear remnants are used as firebreaks by burning the native vegetation in summer. Fortuitously, this burning has been central to the maintenance of much grassland flora.

Fire - in grasslands dominated by Kangaroo Grass some form of disturbance is needed to maintain the diversity of plant species. Much of these areas have traditionally been burnt regularly (for wildfire prevention). Burning halts the accumulation of litter and enlarges the spaces between Kangaroo Grass tussocks so competition is encouraged. Most perennial species will resprout after fire and regeneration from seed often follows burning.

Grazing - grazed paddocks are usually not rich in native grassland species, controlled light grazing is a good form of management. In fact the total exclusion of grazing will lead to a decline in botanical values because of the proliferation of Kangaroo Grass and of weeds which tend to be abundant, but latent on grazed areas.

Restoration

Neville Scarlett and the Botany Department at LaTrobe University are involved in grassland restoration projects at *Mooramong*, a National Trust property near Skipton. The task there is to find, document and arrange to propogate and protect threatened species. 90 hectares of the property has been set aside from heavy grazing. Species found on vulnerable sites are moved to 'prepared' sites at *Mooramong* (sod transplanting), direct seeding has been carried out and transplanting of seedlings propagated from seed. Work has been with grasses, ferns, mosses, bulbs and liverworts. By searching the countryside for grassland remnants, restorers not only locate new populations of plants (and animals) but build a knowledge of the habitat preference of species. This is also important in maximising the chance of choosing an appropiate site for a particular species with the restored grassland.

Our thanks to Neville for providing so much information on grasslands and for telling us something of the valuable work being done at *Mooramong*.

VD

Wombat Forest Excursion **Sunday 5th February, 1995**

Twelve brave or foolhardy naturalists assembled for our first 1995 excursion. Travelling east we left the rain behind us. At McLaughlin Lookout, elevation 843metres, the distant hills of Mt Macedon, Anakie and Buninyong were obscured by cloud. It was not long before the band of rain caught up with us.

It was surprising to see small ferns growing along the side of Wheelers Track in very shallow rocky soil. The plants were Screw fern, *Lindsaea linearis,* and Comb fern, *Schizea bifida.* The branches of the Hakeas had been pruned by Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos feeding on the seeds inside the woody fruits. In a dry autumn few flowers are expected. Some plants seen in bloom were Hop Goodenia, Dodder and a Boronia.

Off Nolan Creek track we inspected a large patch of Bushy Club Moss, *Lycopodium deuterodensum.* Some of these primitive plants were about half a metre tall and the ends of their branches carried fruiting bodies. In this area Coral fern, *Gleichenia microphylla,* was growing.

By the time we reached Nolan Creek picnic ground for lunch it was raining steadily. This did not prevent some bird activity. We saw a Rose Robin, a family group of Flame Robins and a Yellow Robin feeding on a grub. Grey Fantails were hawking insects around a Blackwood. Along the creek were several ferns including Silky Fan Fern, *Sticherus tener.* The Victorian Christmas Bush, *Prostanthera lasianthos,* still held a few flowers. A group of Potato Orchids, *Gastrodia sesamoides,* held their seed pods on robust stems.

The steady rain was continuing so we decided to return home early. Thanks to Pat and Bill Murphy for researching the area and leading the excursion. It was disappointing not to see all the interesting sites which the Murphy's had planned.

JG.

WOODCHIPPING

The Federal Government's clumsy handling of the woodchip licences has seen forest issues rise to the top of the national agenda reports the Australian Conservation Foundation in their recent journal - *Conservation News*.

Two attempts by the Prime Minister to rectify the muddle created by Resources Minister David Beddall have made things worse. While Mr Keating has said that 509 of Senator Faulkner's 1300 recommended high conservation value forest areas will be assessed for protection from woodchipping, they may still be logged for sawlogs and subject to road construction by the various state governments. The states have indicated that they will take no notice of the Commonwealth's list.

Of great concern is the move to postpone the National Forest Policy promise to set up a system of forest reserves by the end of 1995. Mr Keating has set this back to the end of the year 2000, when many valuable areas may have already been logged by state forest agencies.

The ACF say there is a way out of this mess - it involves the Commonwealth taking responsibility for the issue, and ensuring that the protection of our heritage forests proceeds at the same time as the industry's shift into sustainable plantation forestry - but not after the best areas have been logged

The ACF emphasise that we should make it known to our politicians (especially our local Members) that we support the protection of all forests of high conservation value, and that we support the real progress towards the sustainable restructuring of the timber industry by moving it out of native forests and into plantations.

VD



Part 2 no.1

Australian Mammals Found in the Ballarat Area

The Eutherians.
The word comes from the Greek-Eu (well or good) Theria (pl) Therion (beast). They belong to the most highly group of mammals, in which the young are nourished, before birth, by means of a Placenta.

The first of these are the fruit bats and their relatives.

The family PTEROPODIDAE. Fruit bats, flying foxes and related forms that eat nectar and pollen belong to a small group of bats found in Africa Asia and Australia. They have large eyes simple ears and a relatively long snout that makes them resemble a dog or fox, one of the Queensland tube nosed bat has protuberant nostrils, the Queensland blossom bat has a long narrow snout, fruit bats spend their days in camps which may include tens of thousands of individuals , they have a complex structure with several species inhabiting the same roost.
They feed on fruit crushing it and swallowing the juice and small seeds. The blossom and pollen bats feed on pollen and nectar and have brush tipped tongues.
There are about 150 species and fall into five Genera PTEREPUS,flying foxes, DOBSONIA, bare backed fruit bats, NYCTIMENE, tube nosed bats, SYCOYCTERIS and MACROGLOSSUS, blossom bats. There are 8 species in Australia.
Bats are the only Eutherion to reach Australia under their own power, all others were assisted in some form mostly by Man.

Elfin